

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

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R 070958Z DEC 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2471

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 8739

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: THE MODERATE PHALANGE POSITION - MEETING WITH KARIM
PAKRADOUNI

1. SUMMARY. PHALANGE IDEA MAN KARIM PAKRADOUUNI STRONGLY
SUPPORTS PPRESIDENT SARKIS AND A NEW "PRESIDENTIALISM" IN
LEBANON. HE DISAGREES WIIH OTHER PHALANGISTS ON
DESIRABILITY OF DECENTRALIZATION. HE FAVORS PROMPT
ORGANIZATION OF A CABINET. THE MOMENT IS NOT YET RIGHT IN
LEBANON FOR A POLITICAL DIALOGUE. END SUMMARY.

2. ON DEC 4, EMBOFF CALLED ON VOLUBLE AND DIMINUTIVE
KARIM PAKRADOUNI, POLITICAL BUREAU CHIEF OF PHALANGE
PARTY AT HIS HOME AND OFFICE IN ASHRAFIYA. PAKRADOUNI'S
OFFICE, WHICH HAS DIRECT VIEW OF THE TELL ZAATAR
BATTLEGROUND, IS STACKED HIGH WITH BOOKS AND IN FACT
LOOKS MORE LIKE A GRADUATE STUDENT'S PLACE OF ABODE
THAN OFFICE OF A POLITICAL OPERATOR. HIS YOUNG
ASSISTANT, SAMI KRAIDI, WAS ALSO PRESENT.

3. PRESIDENTIALISM. PAKRADOUNI STRONGLY SUPPORTS
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SARKIS, AND BELIEVES HE SHOULD GOVERN WITH A STRONG

HAND, PUTTING ASIDE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE TRADITIONAL LEBANESE PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS. HE NOTED THAT MOST ADVANCED DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES TODAY, INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES AND FRANCE, HAVE LEARNED THAT EXCESSIVE PARLIAMENTARIANISM SIMPLY DID NOT WORK TO BRING TOGETHER A DIVERSITY OF POLITICAL TENDENCIES. HE BELIEVES THAT, SO FAR, SARKIS HAS MOVED VERY SKILLFULLY. PAKRADOUNI DREW A CLEAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN HIS ROLE AS PHALANGIST "MILITANT" AND AS LEBANESE CITIZEN. HE WOULD SUPPORT SARKIS EVEN TO DETRIMENT OF SPECIAL INTERESTS OF PHALANGE. HE THOUGHT IT WAS NOW INCUMBENT ON PRESIDENT TO TAKE SOME STEPS WHICH WILL CLEARLY DEMONSTRATE HIS POWER, PERHAPS ON MATTER OF COLLECTION OF HEAVY WEAPONS FROM THE VARIOUS MILITIAS. HE SAID THAT "TOMORROW" SARKIS WOULD DECLARE STATE OF EMERGENCY AND PRESS CENSORSHIP.

4. OPPOSES DECENTRALIZATION. PAKRADOUNI SAID THAT SOME VOICES IN THE PHALANGE, NOTABLY BECHIR GEMAYEL, FAVORED DECENTRALIZATION, AS A MEANS OF ASSURING MARONITE INTERESTS. HOWEVER, HE DISAGREES MOST EMPHATICALLY WITH THIS VIEWPOINT. IF ANYTHING, INTERESTS OF LEBANON AT THE PRESENT TIME WOULD BE BEST SERVED BY A VERY STRONG CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. (IN "MONDAY MORNING" INTERVIEW DEC 6, PAKRADOUNI DRAWS DISTINCTION BETWEEN "ADMINISTRATIVE DECENTRALIZATION," WHICH HE ACCEPTS, AND "POLITICAL DECENTRALIZATION," WHICH IS MERE RUSE PERPETRATED BY THOSE WHO REALLY WANT PARTITION.)

5. CABINET. PAKRADOUNI SAID THAT HE WAS NOT UNHAPPY THAT PRESIDENT SARKIS HAS SO FAR NOT FORMED NEW CABINET. HOWEVER, HE WILL HAVE TO DO SO SOON, BY WAY OF AFFIRMING HIS PRESIDENTIAL ROLE. THE IMPORTANT THING WAS NOT WHETHER CABINET WAS MADE UP OF "TECHNOCRATS" OR "POLITICIANS," BUT THAT IT BE CLEARLY RESPONSIVE TO SARKIS' OWN LEADERSHIP.

6. POLITICAL DIALOGUE. PAKRADOUNI AGREED WITH EMBOFF'S OBSERVATION THAT THERE WERE MANY POINTS IN COMMON, AT LEAST ON PAPER, BETWEEN POLITICAL PROGRAMS OF KASLIK
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AND LEFTIST NATIONAL MOVEMENT. HOWEVER, PAKRADOUNI THOUGHT THIS WAS NOT THE TIME FOR PHALANGE TO ATTEMPT TO INITIATE POLITICAL DIALOGUE WITH LEBANESE LEFT. RATHER, SUCH A DIALOGUE SHOULD BEGIN ONLY WHEN PRESIDENT SARKIS WAS IN A STRONG POSITION TO DIRECT IT.

7. THE SOUTH. PAKRADOUNI INDICATED THAT HE FULLY UNDERSTOOD DELICATE NATURE OF PRESENT USG FOLE

CONCERNING SOUTH LEBANON, AND EXPRESSED HIS GENUINE APPRECIATION OF AMERICAN ASSISTANCE IN THIS REGARD. HE FEELS IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT SARKIS ESTABLISH PHYSICAL CONTROL OF ALL OF LEBANON, TO INCLUDE THE SOUTH. HE FLATLY OPPOSES ANY ARRANGEMENT UNDER WHICH CHAMOUNIST MILITIA OR LEBANESE ARMY REMNANTS UNDER LEADERSHIP OF HANNA SAID, PRESENTLY IN THE SOUTH, WOULD BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE TO PREDOMINATE IN AREA FOR SAKE OF ISRAEL'S INTERESTS. HE IS COMPLETELY CONFIDENT THAT ISRAEL WILL UNDERSTAND THAT SMALL SYMBOLIC ARAB SECURITY FORCE IN THE SOUTH COULD POSE NO THREAT TO ISRAEL. HE SAID THAT, IF HE WERE PRESIDENT SARKIS, HE WOULD SIMPLY INFORM ISRAEL (VIA THE US) THAT HE WAS PROCEEDING TO DEPLOY TROOPS IN THE SOUTH.

8. CONTROLLING THE PALESTINIANS. IMPORTANCE OF ASF DEPLOYMENT IN SOUTH, PAKRADOUNI SAID, WAS TO PERMIT SYRIAN ASF TO CONTROL THE PALESTINIANS. WHEN EMBOFF ASKED IF A MERELY "SYMBOLIC" FORCE IN PLACES SUCH AS TYRE AND NABATIYAH WOULD BE SUFFICIENT FOR THIS PURPOSE, PAKRADOUNI THOUGHT YES. HE SAID THAT PALESTINIANS WOULD KNOW THAT "SYMBOLIC" FORCE WOULD BE BACKED UP BY MUCH STRONGER SYRIAN FORCE WITHIN EASY MARCHING DISTANCE. SYRIANS WOULD ALSO BE IN POSITION, IF NECESSARY, TO RETALIATE AGAINST PALESTINIANS IN FORCE ELSEWHERE.

9. ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION OF KHADDA. PAKRADOUNI (WHO HAD VISITED DAMASCUS TO SEE SYRIAN FORMER KHADDAM A FEW DAYS EARLIER) SAID THAT HIS UNDERSTANDING WAS THAT SYRIAN GOVERNMENT INDEED ALREADY KNEW EXACTLY WHO HAD PERPETRATED ATTEMPT AGAINST KHADDAM, BUT WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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DELIBERATELY HOLDING OFF ON ARRESTING THEM, IN HOPE OF CATCHING OTHER MEMBERS OF "BLACK JUNE."

10. US ROLE. PAKRADOUNI IS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT WHAT HE REGARDS AS VERY CONSTRUCTIVE US ROLE AT PRESENT TIME IN LEBANON. HE EXPRESSED WISH THAT US WOULD CONSTANTLY REAFFIRM ITS SUPPORT OF LEBANESE UNITY AND NATIONAL INTEGRITY. HE HOPED THAT US WOULD CLEARLY STATE THAT ITS SUPPORT OF THESE PRINCIPLES ALSO MEANT OPPOSITION TO PARTITION.

11. COMMENT: PAKRADOUNI (WHO IS ARMENIAN) IS KNOWN AS RELATIVE "MODERATE" WITHIN PHALANGIST CIRCLES AND IT IS CLEAR THAT HE IS STILL PLAYING THIS ROLE. HIS ABILITY TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN INTERESTS AND POSITIONS

OF HIS OWN PARTY AND INTERESTS OF NATION AS A WHOLE
SETS HIM APART FROM MOST LEBANESE POLITICAL FIGURES.
IT IS REMARKABLE THAT, ON A FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH AN
EMBASSY OFFICER, HE WOULD CLEARLY STATE SOME OF HIS OWN
DIFFERENCES OF OPINION WITH OTHER LEADING MEMBERS OF
HIS PARTY. THE PHALANGE HAS CONSISTENTLY BEEN MORE
SUPPORTIVE OF PRESIDENT SARKIS THAN OTHER KFUR FRONT
PARTIES, AND IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT, AS LONG AS
PAKRADOUNI IS A MAJOR INFLUENCE IN THE PARTY, THIS
SUPPORT OF THE RPESIDENT WILL CONTINUE. END COMMENT.
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